



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Agricultural
Marketing
Service

STOP 0249 – Room 2092-S
1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Washington, D.C. 20250-0249

FEBRUARY 2009

**NOTICE TO THE TRADE
PUBLIC MEETING FOR CATFISH PRODUCERS, SUPPLIERS, PROCESSORS
AND OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES**

The Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) Livestock and Seed (LS) Program and the Department of Commerce (DOC) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) invite current and potential catfish producers, suppliers, processors, and other interested parties to participate in a public meeting concerning the development of a USDA voluntary grade standard and grading program for catfish. Provisions of the recently enacted 2008 Farm Bill directed the Secretary of Agriculture to establish, within USDA, a voluntary fee-based grading program for catfish. Once a voluntary standard is established, catfish producers may request that the grade standard be applied to catfish and catfish products by USDA for a fee. During the public meeting, attendees will have the opportunity to provide information, comments, and data to USDA and DOC either verbally or in writing.

When: Thursday, February 26, 2009, 1-5 p.m. Central Standard Time

**Where: Holiday Inn Select-Memphis Airport
2240 Democrat Road
Memphis, Tennessee 38132
Phone: (901) 332-1130**

Pre-Registration Information:

Shuttle service is available from the airport. Lodging reservations may be made at the host facility for \$99, plus tax for the night of the meeting (February 26, 2009) by calling the Holiday Inn Select at the number provided above and requesting the USDA Conference Rate. Participants are responsible for making their own lodging arrangements. In order to obtain the conference room rate, reservations must be made no later than 5 p.m. on Monday, February 23, 2009. There are a limited number of rooms blocked for this meeting at the \$99 rate. Once those rooms are reserved, the hotel will not be obligated to honor the rate for additional reservations.

Pre-registration for the conference is requested. Please fax the attached form to (202) 720-1112 by Monday, February 23, 2009. We also invite you and your colleagues to submit questions in advance. If you would like additional information or want to submit questions, please call Martin O'Connor of the Standards, Analysis and Technology Branch on (202) 720-7046 or E-mail him at Martin.Oconnor@usda.gov.

We value your participation and look forward to your attendance at the public meeting.

William T. Sessions
Associate Deputy Administrator
Livestock and Seed Program

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SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION-SCHEDULED EVENT

Public Meeting: February 26, 2009

Target Audience: Catfish Producers, Suppliers, Processors, and Other Interested Parties

Currently, administration and application of the U.S. Standards for Grades of North American Freshwater Catfish and Products Made Therefrom (<http://www.seafood.nmfs.noaa.gov/Catfish.PDF>) are performed by the USDC, NOAA, NMFS. Provisions of the recently enacted 2008 Farm Bill directed the Secretary of Agriculture to establish, within USDA, a voluntary fee-based grading program for catfish. Grading standards and programs may be established for additional species of farm-raised fish or farm-raised shellfish after the Secretary receives a petition requesting a voluntary fee-based grading program.

A public meeting will be convened to allow interested parties to provide input to USDA and DOC on the possible development or restructuring of catfish grade standards by both agencies. Participants attending should be prepared to provide information, comments, data, and discuss or respond to additional questions regarding the following or closely related issues:

- Is there sufficient interest of the catfish industry to identify the development of a voluntary fee-based USDA catfish grading program?
- Could such a program have enough voluntary users to financially support a grading program?
- What are the perceived benefits of using USDA to administer a catfish grading program?
- What are the industry expectations of such a USDA catfish grade standard program?
- What are the industry expectations of the NMFS catfish grade standards?
- Do the NMFS catfish grade standards have perceived deficiencies that limit their use?
- What key components should be included in a proposed USDA catfish grade standard?
- How are these components different from those offered by NMFS and what changes are needed?
- Should USDA use the current NMFS catfish grade standards?
- Should a proposed USDA catfish grade standard keep the NMFS grade designations (U.S. Grade A, B, and C) or develop new nomenclature?

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- Should application of any proposed USDA catfish grade standard be limited to fresh (not frozen) products only?
- What market forms (headed and gutted, headed and dressed, whole fillets, trimmed fillets, fillet strips, steaks, nuggets, etc.) should be eligible for receiving a USDA catfish grade designation?
- What method of inspection (stationary lot, in-line, cumulative inspection, etc.) should be considered to maximize the usefulness of any proposed USDA catfish grade standard program?
- Should a proposed USDA catfish grade standard program be based on process control of quality characteristic?
- What labeling requirements should be incorporated into a proposed USDA catfish grade standard program?
- Overall, what would a proposed USDA catfish grade standard offer that is not currently offered, or possibly offered by NMFS?
- If developed, what is the industry expectation for USDA and NMFS working cooperatively to administer the program, and is cross utilization a possibility?

Attachment

REGISTRATION FORM

**LIVESTOCK AND SEED PROGRAM
CATFISH GRADE STANDARD PUBLIC MEETING**

**Holiday Inn Select – Memphis Airport
2240 Democrat Road
Memphis, Tennessee 38132**

For lodging reservations, call Holiday Inn Select - Airport at (901) 332-1130 and request the USDA Conference rate by 5 p.m. on Wednesday, February 18, 2009.

Fax this registration form to Ivy Fairchild at: (202) 720-1112 by Monday, February 23, 2009.

Company Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ ZIP: _____

Business Phone: _____

To assist us in our planning of conference facilities, please list planned attending company's representatives (use additional sheets if needed).

Name(s) of Person(s) Attending

Questions for discussion:
